

Answers to Frequently Asked Questions Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS)

Q. What is the focus of the Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS)?

A. The YRBS focuses on health-risk behaviors established during youth that contribute to the leading causes of death, disability, and social problems among youth and adults. These include behaviors that result in unintentional and intentional injuries, tobacco use, alcohol and other drug use, sexual behaviors that contribute to HIV infection, other sexually transmitted diseases (STDs), and unintended pregnancies, unhealthy dietary behaviors and physical inactivity.

Q. Why is the survey being done?

A. The YRBS data is invaluable for use in planning and grant writing, Safe & Drug Free Schools, and school improvement planning. The YRBS monitors priority health-risk behaviors among youth to create school health programs to help reduce these behaviors.

Q. What does your school receive for participating in the YRBS?

A. Your school will receive a copy of the published state report. A local report will also be provided if your school meets the state guidelines for reporting.

Q. Are sensitive questions asked?

A. Yes. Some questions are sensitive. To help solve health problems among our youth, we must ask questions about health-risk behaviors. Attempted suicide, tobacco use, alcohol and other drug use, weapon carrying and sexual behavior are sensitive issues. Questions are presented in a straightforward and sensitive manner.

Q. Will student names be used or linked to the surveys?

A. No. The survey has been designed to protect student privacy. Students do not put their names on the survey. When a student finishes the survey, he or she places it in a self sealing envelope. The envelopes are then placed in a big box.

Q. Do students take the survey more than once to see how their behaviors change?

A. No. A new sample of schools and students is drawn each time the survey is administered. Students who take part cannot be tracked because their names are not on the survey and no identifying information is collected.

Q. What if school districts, schools or students do not choose to participate?

A. Participation in the YRBS is voluntary. However, to develop accurate state and national estimates of priority health-risk behaviors among adolescents, participation rates

must be high. Selected schools and students cannot be replaced. The goal is to achieve 90 percent to 95 percent participation by selected schools and students.

Q. What grade levels are included?

A. The YRBS is administered to students in grades seven and eight and grades nine through 12. Two separate surveys are used.

Q. Ho many students are involved from each school?

A. One or two classes (approximately 25 to 50 students) in each grade (9-12) are selected randomly to participate in each school. Approximately 100 to 200 students are asked to participate in each grade nine through 12.

Q. How are schools selected to be in the survey?

A. A stratified, random sample of schools is selected. The probability of a school being selected is based on enrollment.

Q. How long does it take to fill out the survey? Does the survey include a physical test?

A. One class period is needed to fill out the written survey. The survey does not include a physical test or exam.

Q. Do students answer questions truthfully?

A. Research indicates data of this nature may be gathered as reliably from adolescents as from adults. Internal reliability checks help identify the small percentage of students who falsify their answers. To obtain truthful answers, students must perceive the survey as important and know that procedures have been developed to protect their privacy and allow for anonymous participation. This is accomplished by providing individual, self-sealing envelopes for answer sheets and having an adult present during survey administration.

Q. When is the survey conducted? When are results available?

A. Data collection occurs during the spring on odd-numbered years. Results are published the following year. All participating states and schools receive a copy of the results.

Q. What kind of parent permission is needed?

A. Since 1995, the North Dakota Department of Public Instruction has recommended that schools use passive parental permission. More information about protecting student confidentiality when conducting the YRBS can be found on the Department's website.

Q. What does it mean for data to be “weighted?”

A. Weighting is a mathematical procedure that makes data representative of the population from which it was drawn. In the YRBSS, only surveys with a scientifically drawn sample, appropriate documentation, and an overall response rate of at least 60% are weighted.

Q. How are YRBS data weighted?

A. YRBS data are weighted to adjust for school and student non response and to make the data representative of the population of students from which the sample was drawn. Generally, these adjustments are made by applying a weight based on student sex, grade, and race/ethnicity.

Q. Who does the National YRBS data represent?

National YRBS data are representative of all public and private school students in grades 9-12 in the 50 states and the District of Columbia. National YRBS data are not the aggregate of the state YRBS data; the National YRBS uses a separate scientific sample of schools and students.

Q. Who does the state and local YRBS data represent?

A. State and local YRBS data that are weighted are representative of all public school students in grades 9-12 in the respective jurisdiction. State and local YRBS data that are not weighted are representative only of the students who completed the survey in the respective jurisdiction.

Q. Where can additional information be obtained?

A. To obtain additional information about the YRBS, contact:

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